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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Head Start Primary Continuation Learning Project, a demonstration project designed to investigate whether continuity of relationship with an assistant teacher from Head Start through third grade can help children maintain gains made in Head Start and provide smooth transition into public school. Ten assistant teachers (most of whom began in Head Start as parents) in ten elementary schools accompany the children into kindergarten and the first three grades. A second project goal is to enable each assistant teacher to earn a B.A. degree and teaching credential. The retention rate of adults is seen as significant, while transiency among children has been high. An achievement of the program has been the emergence of a co-equal working relationship between community people and professionals, with the administrative staff recruited from paraprofessionals from minority and inner-city communities. Four elements observed in the course of the program were (1) assurance of progress to participants, with help in attaining degrees and credentials, (2) support of development of each person, (3) facilitating communication and (4) fostering continuity of relationships, in line with the project's essential concept that a person, rather than a curriculum model, will provide a smooth Head Start-to-school transition. (Author/BF)

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"CONTINUITY IN URBAN EDUCATION: A DEMONSTRATION"

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The Head Start Primary Continuation Learning Project is a demonstration project of the Office of Child Development in ten Southern California elementary schools. Its primary objective is to maintain the gains made by children in Head Start. Assistant Teachers, most of whom had began in Head Start as parents, accompany the children into the public school as Assistant Teachers, providing continuity into kindergarten and the first three grades. Now, in the fifth year of the program, Wave One, consisting of ten Assistant Teachers and their children, has just completed Grade Three and the ten Assistant Teachers of Wave Two are in Grade Three. A second goal of the project is to enable each Assistant Teacher, hereafter referred to as Continuation Teacher (C.T.), to earn a B.A. degree and teaching credential in the course of the five year project.

Setting for the Program

Children were recruited from ten Head Start sites of one delegate agency, eight sites in the largest urban school district in Southern California and two in a Los Angeles County area. Prior to 1973 when the first performance standards for Head Start were provided by the Office of Child Development, the quality of each program was directly affected by how much or how little the staff of a given delegate agency knew about education of young children. The delegate agency for the Head Start sites in this program is the Foundation for Early Childhood Education, organized in 1965 by a group of members of the Nursery School Teachers Union, women who had had extensive experience as Teacher-Directors in Parent Participation Nursery Schools. The Foundation placed an experienced nursery school teacher in every Head Start site to provide a model for less experienced or less well prepared staff. This was significantly different from many Head Start programs where there was no one experienced in teaching young children; in the least effective settings the focus may even have shifted from a Head Start for children to concern for employment of adults. In the case of the Foundation, not only the extensive background of the experienced staff but

also the Union affiliation, which included certain standards and expectations for teachers, ensured the Head Start teachers and assistants on-the-job training, upgrading and educational preparation in Child Development.

When the Continuation Project began, a Creative Environment Workshop (1) had been created in an industrial shed at the agency headquarters and an approach to adult learning by doing had been begun. This workshop has expanded during the past four years to provide classes for parents and a nursery school within the workshop for children of mothers who come to learn to sew or construct objects from Tri-Wall. Teachers also use the workshop; often teams work together. Its existence and the ways activities are fostered by a facilitator underlines the belief of this agency and this Project that learning of adults as well as children should be active, involve concrete materials, start with the goals of the learner and enable him to meet his goals before asking him to contribute to achievement of other goals external to him. During the program all Continuation Teachers have worked in the workshop weekly.

The Status of the Program Today

The retention rate of adults in the program has been remarkable. One Continuation Teacher left because of illness during the first semester of 1971; she was replaced by a Continuation Teacher who had served as a substitute in Head Start classes. A second C.T. from Wave Two had to leave because of illness and personal reasons, but was replaced by an Assistant Teacher from the same site, thus maintaining continuity of relationships with children. The three paraprofessionals on the Administrative Staff continue to participate in the program even though they have been offered positions elsewhere; all have earned B.A.'s.

Transiency among children has been high. However, there is some evidence that it is lower among the children who came from Head Start than for others in the same schools. Whether this is because Head Start families represent a select population (parental initiative was involved to

enroll a child in Head Start) or whether this reflects effects of the Continuation project is not known.

The retention rate for these adults is even more impressive when one considers that the C.T.'s were employed full time in public school, were attending weekly inservice workshops and college classes, and had families to care for. In fact, several were sole support of four or more children. All have experienced throughout the four years financial distress aggravated by inflation.

At the beginning of the fifth year of the Project four Wave One C.T.'s are fully employed, two in kindergartens with many Spanish-speaking children; two have returned to the Head Start agency, one as a Head Teacher and one as a child Development Supervisor, career advancement for both of them. Five others are participating in observation and team taught classrooms; one is acting as a parent coordinator. Wave Two C.T.'s are continuing to work toward degrees and credentials.

Societal events created difficulties. Changes in California credential law meant that Wave One Continuation Teachers had to complete their degrees and credentials by September, 1974 rather than September, 1976; this undue pressure tended to shift the energies and efforts of staff away from improving instruction for children toward the important goal of enabling the adults to complete their academic work. Decreasing school enrollments and calls for racial balance made employment difficult when the Wave One people had completed their formal work.

Cooperation as a Goal

A genuine achievement of the Program has been the emergence over a four year period of co-equal working relationships between community people and professionals. In most programs one or the other group is dominant. When it is community, professionals become defensive and accomplish little; when it is the professionals, community people tend to be intimidated and provide only token participation.

Washington, discussing the collaborative approach to evaluation of

the Child Development Associate program, points out that

> Programs like Head Start and Follow Through are excellent examples of the instances in which the values and goals associated with race and administrative structure interface. In countless programs the administration and teachers are white and the teacher's aides, cooks, janitors, bus drivers, etc., are non-white. For the most part the people who have direct input into the evaluation of these programs are white, while the other important members of the staff tend to be on-lookers and the recipients of decision-making in which they play a minor role... The involvement of citizens or "non-professionals" at something other than a superficial level rarely happens even if the individuals are white. (2)

In the Continuation Learning Project cooperative effort can be seen at the classroom level with C.T.'s and Teachers working as effective teams, sharing instructional and other duties in the classroom and in the work of the Administrative and Education Staffs.

The Administrative Staff of the project was recruited from paraprofessionals associated with the agency in a deliberate effort by the Director to demonstrate that people from minority and inner-city communities can move into positions of policy and decision making at an administrative level. The staff consists of the Director, who had been the Head Start Child Development Trainer, the Career Development Coordinator, who had been a social work trainee in Head Start and had not completed college, two parent coordinators, who had been Head Start mothers. A fifth staff member the first year was the Curriculum Coordinator; she was later joined by two Resource Associates, first part time and then full time, who work directly in classrooms, modelling ways of working with children and helping teachers develop instructional materials and curriculum activities.

The Administrative staff includes one White, two Blacks and one Chicana; the three members of the Education Staff are White. In the course of the program, the Education Staff tended at times to out-talk the Administrative staff, or members of the latter rejected members of the Education Staff.

Currently, in the beginning of the fifth year, the two staffs are working jointly, sharing in decision making.

The important issue is that it took time to get here, time and diligent attention to the goal of shared effort so the skills of every person could be used. What has sometimes been called a win-win posture, in which everyone gains when anyone gains, has characterized the program, particularly the Director's way of working. I, as evaluator, have been able to provide constant feedback to the Director based on written logs, observations and interviews and to become aware of some of the processes which have fostered cooperation and led to the continued effective participation of the C.T.'s.

Four elements which have been observed in the course of the program are these:

Assurance of Progress to Participants
Support of the Development of Each Person
Facilitating Communication
Fostering Continuity of Relationships

Assurance of Progress

In most programs employing education aides, there is no assurance that they will progress. A highly sensitive young woman from Cuba, employed as a bi-lingual aide in a Title I Early Childhood School, recently confided to me that she goes to all the in-service classes and workshops available to teachers. The teachers are assured salary point credit while she, attending voluntarily, receives neither salary nor unit credit, and sees no prospect of a change in her status. In the Continuation Project this is not the case. Negotiations with several public and private colleges conducted by the Career Coordinator have made possible credit for courses offered conveniently at the Project Workshop, have resulted in course equivalency credit for life experience, and credit for field work.

Undoubtedly the assurance that they would be helped in every way to attain their goals of degrees and credentials and the very real and practical support from the Career Coordinator and the Administrative Staff have

been an incentive for staying in the program.

The theme of graduation has been an on-going one. Early in the first year, C.T.'s talked about how much a graduation ceremony means when no one in your family has ever had one, or is likely to because of all the costs involved; having a graduation ceremony for children from Head Start was then understood in a new light. When the Wave One C.T.'s did graduate from college, it was a significant step indeed, one which children, husbands, friends shared with pride.

In any urban program educational opportunities should be provided in a form both convenient and realistic for each person, whether child, aide, teacher or parent. For some the goal may be an advanced degree; two C.T.'s and several teachers are working toward M.A.'s. For some it will be an A.A. degree or high school credit.

An episode with parents who wished to learn sewing is relevant. Arrangements were made to employ an adult education teacher. A bi-lingual teacher was sought and found. However, she was unfamiliar with a setting in which mothers were learning while their young children played in an adjacent area. She objected to mothers responding to their children's needs and to women moving about to get coffee. By the end of the fourth session, in which no sewing had been begun, but registration procedures were conducted at length and lists of "essential" sewing equipment were dictated to women who had little if any cash, the Parent Education Specialist terminated the arrangement. She then found a mother who was an expert seamstress and a member of the community to take over the class. She herself has since qualified as a parent education instructor, which makes it possible for mothers to earn high school credit for their workshop class.

Supporting the Development of Each Person

In this project everyone teaches and everyone learns. The formal schooling of the adults involved, staff as well as C.T.'s, ranged from high school level to doctoral study; the volunteer group included parents with little or no formal education and also M.A. candidates engaged in field work. The concern for the continued development of each person was central. Graduate students learned from parent coordinators who understood inner city parents. The Workshop facilitator learned to speak English while

teaching credentialled teachers how to use power tools or how to design a puppet theatre. The Career Coordinator became skilled in negotiating with institutions of higher learning but he also taught C.T.'s how to take examinations. C.T.'s helped each other with college work; this evolved into highly sophisticated tutoring sessions in which currently people who need to improve writing skills write, critique each other's writing and rewrite, and then critique the new essay or report. Classroom teachers learned from C.T.'s how to relate to parents while C.T.'s learned about school curricula. Sometimes it was the C.T. who demonstrated approaches to science, or art or learning centers which the Teachers had not known or had not valued.

In short, the Project ignores the traditional concept which assigns the role of teacher to one who is older, has more degrees and is of higher status and the learner is the younger the less well educated or of lower status. By doing so, a climate is created in which everyone can ask for help and anyone can learn from another.

During the first year of the project the meetings of the C.T.'s reflected the anxiety and anger that they understandably felt as they were treated in schools like aides rather than teachers experienced and prepared in Head Start, and as they observed children and parents treated in ways inappropriate to their beliefs about the worth of these families. Lack of knowledge and severe misunderstandings among public school personnel about Head Start and the children it serves aggravated the feelings of frustration and irritation. Workshops were designed to allow feelings to be ventilated.

Concern about curriculum became great as C.T.'s moved from kindergarten, which most thought of as being like Head Start, into the primary grades and discovered how much emphasis on a formal structured curriculum existed there. Recognition of the need for direct help with instruction led to the augmentation of the staff with, first, one Resource Associate, then two part-time and currently two full time Resource Associates. This was not merely to assist the C.T.'s. The designated credentialled teachers, some more enthusiastically than others, make extensive use of the Resource

Teachers to learn to make instructional materials, to extend their knowledge in math, arts and science, to develop classroom environments and learning centers. This has developed naturally out of the monthly workshops for Teachers and C.T.'s in which demonstrations of instructional procedures have been provided by Consultants and Resource Associates.

At the beginning of the project there was no commitment to work on curriculum. Nor did the Director initially anticipate how much help is needed by Teachers and C.T.'s alike. As a result of the in-classroom help of the Associates, coupled with the workshops, there are now extensive in-service programs being conducted at the request of the public schools. This kind of staff development holds real promise for urban schools. It is far easier for teachers to understand the learning needs of children when they are themselves actively engaged in learning. A major recommendation growing out of the Continuation Project would be for the expenditure of funds on staff development, making use of such an agency as this, much in the fashion of Teacher Centres in the United Kingdom. Linkage of a Head Start program to the public schools is achieved to the advantage of both.

Facilitating Communication

In the first year evaluation report[3] the following observations were made:

A. There is a great deal of Telephoning. The Director telephones personnel in every role in the Project and others do also; whether the amount and frequency is a result of modelling by the Director is not clear. What does seem clear is that the significances of the telephoning are: an effort to keep everyone informed, fostering a sense of shared concern, recognition of subtle relationships among persons, and most of all a commitment to keeping everyone involved in behalf of the major goals of the Project.

B. Food is an important and obvious theme. At every in-service session, at every Parent meeting, at every staff meeting, food and drink are provided, sometimes by the agency, frequently by Teachers or Assistant Teachers or consultants. It appears to have importance far beyond nutrition. The likelihood is that provision of food has been picked up as a natural extension from Head Start in which it represented acceptance, community of concern, sharing, a sense of generosity, appreciation.

C. Recognition, Honors and Awards are frequent. To these Assistant Teachers in this agency awards for effort as Parents and para-professionals were important. Now, as Assistant Teachers in Kindergarten, they have maintained this tradition and go to endless effort (on top of jobs and home and schooling) to plan events in which they can recognize participating Parents, the Kindergarten Teacher and Principals with certificates and awards.

D. Celebration and festivity are important. Formal gowns, corsages, decorated rooms, gifts and, above all, a party feeling characterize not only awards ceremonies, held at the end of the year in each school and instigated by the Assistant Teachers and Parent Coordinators, but Parent meetings as well.

E. Making Things and Doing For Oneself and One's Family probably grow out of the Head Start tradition of "beautiful junk." The fact that the agency did not urge or influence these Parents to focus on educational materials which would enhance Project classrooms is characteristic of the agency's acceptance of the need for people to satisfy their own needs.

A buffet luncheon has come to be a tradition at the end of each year, with everyone contributing and teachers and C.T.'s alike joining in dancing, singing and instrumental music. This tradition grew in some schools to draw in the community people, grandparents as well as parents, in a grand end of year celebration.

Fostering Continuity of Relationships for Children and Adults

The essential concept of this project is that continuity of relationship with a person would serve to maintain gains made in Head Start as children moved into public school. A person, rather than a curriculum model, would provide for a smooth transition if that person knew the child and his family and had a genuine concern for his well-being and success in school. In the judgment of the Director, the latter was more true of some Assistant Teachers than others; thus her judgment regarding this commitment was one of the criteria of selection of Assistants for the Continuation Project.

Children and parents alike were severely disappointed when "their" teacher did not continue with the children of Wave One beyond Grade Three. Now fourth graders, they frequently return to see "their" Continuation Teacher in the instances in which she is still in the same school or nearby. Continuation Director Shirley Cloke now believes it is possible that the continuous relationship might be productive for an even longer period than the first three grades for children in the Inner City.

Another kind of continuity has developed. Eight classroom teachers have elected to move on with the Continuation Teacher and the children. They consistently report how much easier the beginning of school is, how much time they save, and how rewarding continuing relationships with children and parents are. The effectiveness of teaming is heightened when they work together for two or three years. Warm friendships and continued mutual support have developed in team after team.

In view of the mobility of urban families and the transiency of children, urban education should give serious consideration to ways of providing continuity in relationships as one way of creating stability in the lives of children and adults.

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